

McLellan-Sweat House
(Hugh McLellan House;
Lorenzo de Medici House)
111 High Street
Portland
Cumberland County
Maine

HABS No. ME-121

HABS
ME
3-PORT,
6-

PHOTOGRAPHS

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HABS
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6-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MCLELLAN-SWEAT HOUSE
(HUGH MCLELLAN HOUSE;
LORENZO DE MEDICI SWEAT HOUSE)

HABS No. ME-121

Location: NE corner of intersection of Spring and High Streets,
now numbered 111 High Street, Portland, Cumberland
County, Maine.

Present Owner: Portland Society of Art, 111 High Street, Portland,
Maine.

Present Occupant: Portland Society of Art.

Present Use: Lorenzo de Medici Sweat Memorial, Art and Historical
Museum.

Significance: A handsome Federal Style house, with noteworthy
detailing and interior woodwork. Significant as
documentation of the lifestyle of the merchant elite
of early 19th century New England.

Physical History
and Chain of
Ownership:

The building was used as a residence with only minor
changes until 1911, when it was opened to the public
as a museum and memorial. After 1957 the last
resident's Victorian furnishings were removed and
restoration of the building began.

Land owned in common by the Brackett family was
transferred between May 1800 and October 1801 to Hugh
McLellan and Robert Boyd, who divided it into lots
October 29, 1801 so that H. McLellan owned the
property of the present house. No buildings are
mentioned.

(Cumberland County Records, Bk 32 p. 436-7
33 38-45
47 166
35 583
36 7-8)

In 1815, Hugh McLellan being in debt, the lot was
appraised with a 3 story brick dwelling house on it,
and sold by Samuel F. Hussey, Matthew Cobb and John
Mussey to the Portland Bank, which sold it to Asa
Clapp in 1817.

By 1823 Charles Q. Clapp, son of the owner, was recorded as living in it. In 1832 Asa Clapp sold the house to Joshua Wingate, whose daughter Julia married Charles Clapp, (and they lived next door in the Clapp-Stevens house). First the Wingates, then widow Wingate and later the younger Clapps and finally the widow Clapp, lived in the house until 1877 when the last died and her daughters presumably inherited the house. (Records lost.) The Clapp daughters, Mrs. Carol and Mrs. Ray, sold the house in 1880 to Lorenzo de Medici Sweat. Mrs. Sweat left the house to the Portland Society of Art in 1911.

(Cumberland County Records, Bk 71 p. 169, 184
77 308
129 432
165 180
467 355)

Date of erection:

1800, according to the list of dwellings in the Journals of Rev. Samuel Deane, p. 413. But 1801 according to Willis' annotation of the Journals — footnote p. 234. According to William Goold, b. 1809 and writing (from memory?) in the 1880's the date is variously given as 1800 or 1801. ("Old Houses and their Builders, pp. 114-115.) 1801-15 seems indicated by the County Records, but 1800 is possible if the Boyd-McLellan transactions of October 29, 1801 (Bk 36 p. 7-8) merely legalized a division of the lot already accepted in practice.

Architect:

Thought to have been Alexander Parris. The earliest reference found to Parris is from the 1880's: "But in describing the house I have forgotten its builders. The chief architect was said to have been Captain Alexander Parris." (William Goold (d. 1890) writing after the Sweats acquired the house, i.e. 1880-90, in "Old Houses and their Builders" etc.) Goold says later in the same article that in 1800 people began to build expensive houses, that the McLellan houses were built then, and that "Parris began to draft houses for the wealthy people, but I think none were erected by his drawings until the next year."

He also says "I think Parris was not the architect of the McLellan houses attributed him (by whom?)—except, perhaps, the Major McLellan-Wingate portico; the details I think were by Kimball."

Builders and
Original plans:

According to William Goold's "Old Houses and their Builders" the house was "commenced in 1801 by his (John Kimball's) father while he was still an apprentice. All the carving in the fine house was done by him. Another workman of the town, Harrison Brazier, finished the entrance hall." A relative of the family who recollected the building of the house, told me years ago, that Brazier worked on the hall continuously for 97 days. Again, according to Goold, John Kimball, Sr., "was an architect, and the first in Portland who made any pretense to professional knowledge of that art. He studied from English works on the subject.... A son of Mr. Kimball of the same name (b. 1783) ... as an accomplished architect and carpenter and stood at the head of his profession while he worked at it." Goold, as recorded above, attributed most of the house to Kimball. Also "when the house was commenced the cellar wall was begun on the grass, and the earth for the surrounding bank was hauled there." In the same article Goold lists carpenters and masons active in Portland ca. 1800-20. No early plans known. Note Goold's reference to his sources. He was born in 1809.

Alterations:

"Charles I. (sic.) Clapp cut down the lower front windows and enclosed them with iron balconies." (Goold, "Old Houses and their Builders.") (i.e. mid 19th century.) The Sweats presumably changed downstairs mantels to black marble, and made a door of the Palladian window over the front door. (i.e. late 19th century). In 1910-11 the Portland Art Museum was built from the NE wall and ell of the house, John Calvin Stevens of Portland, Maine architect. The original drawings are in the Stevens office. This enclosed the former garden entrance which had led to a platform and steps to the garden, and concealed one side of the ell which was two story with a flat hipped roof and no balustrade (unsigned newspaper article in Maine Historical Society, Portland Scrapbook v. 7, p. 56). In 1957 Mrs. Sweat's will was changed to allow restoration: the upper and lower hall, and the dining room and master bedroom (both on the High-Spring corner of the house) were restored in 1958 with Andrew Hepburn of Perry, Shaw, Hepburn and Dean of Boston as consultant. The only structural change was the replacement of two marble mantels from the 1806 Preble House on Congress Street.

The east front sitting room and bedroom above it were restored by John Pancoast in 1962-63. The iron balconies outside the front first floor windows were apparently removed in the 20th century.

Historical Events:

The McLellans were a merchant family, as were the Clapps and Wingates. L.D.M. Sweat was a state senator and a Democratic representative to Congress. Mrs. Sweat wrote travel books, and a well received review of George Sands' writings. (Museum records). Lafayette is said to have visited the house but actually didn't (Portland Scrapbook 7, p. 56), and Pavlova is said to have visited there. (Museum records.) Julia Clapp, according to William Goold ("Hallowell Inscriptions," 1870's, p. 10) "retained her father's elegant residence with its wealth of art and extensive library," and another record of 1878 (Ed. Elwell, p. 59) says the house "preserves the old time architecture and rich internal finish and contains a valuable collection of paintings and works of art."

The Sweats also added furnishings and art from their travels here and abroad. The house apparently had a very cultured image from the mid 19th century on. Mrs. Sweat's will required that the first and second front rooms and their furnishings remain absolutely unaltered as "fairly representing a home of the nineteenth century." But the will was changed and accretions removed. (Museum records) Chatty notes about families who occupied the house are in "Mansion Memories" by Alice Hinckley, (mid 20th century, in an unnamed bulletin of the Portland Junior League preserved in the Museum Records).

Old View:

Two framed photos (Museum files) ca. 1900 from High Street, show the iron balconies on lower front windows. One shows the church behind the house and one a portion of the ell or an addition of it, which looks like clapboard over a garden arbor. Three details of woodwork and door frames appeared in American Architect, vol. CIV, no. 1969, September 17, 1913. A 3 x 3 snapshot taken from High Street dated 1899, in the Maine Historical Society, shows the ell, which appears brick, without any arbor, with two windows and a half-basement window showing. Photographs in the files of the Museum show the interior of the house before removal of the Sweat furnishings, as does Portland Scrapbook vol. 7, p. 56 ff.

Sources:

Deane, Samuel. Journals of the Rev. Thomas Smith and the Rev. Samuel Deane, with notes, etc., by William Willis.

Elwell, Edward. Portland and Vicinity, Loring, Short and Harmon and W. W. Jones, Portland, Maine. 1876, p. 59.

Goold, William. Hallowell, Maine, Inscriptions copied from the old cemetery: p. 10, (on General Wingate, with reference to house.)

Goold, William. "Old Houses and their Builders" in William Goold Scrapbook, p. 114, Maine Historical Society.

American Architect, vol. CIV, No. 1696, Sept. 17, 1913.

Maine, American Guide Series, Writers project WPA, Houghton-Mifflin Company, Boston, 1937. mention pp. 183-84, picture p. 252 ff.

Portland City Guide, American Guide Series, Writer's program of Works Project Administration, Forest City Printing Company, Portland Maine, 1940. (General description p. 236, picture ff 146).

Portland Scrapbook, v. 7, p. 56, 10 (Maine Historical Society) with 5 photographs, article of ca. 1909.

Maine Historical Society, unpagged and undated ms. on McLellan-Sweat House, includes goods description of interior spaces and notes on rooms uses ca. 1900.

Maine Historical Society, Photo file.

Portland Society of Art, Miscellaneous files and records.

Cumberland County Office, Records.

Interview, John Pancoast, Director, Portland Art Museum.

Prepared by: Martha Kingsbury
Summer '65

Sources Addenda:

Photo of front door and portico in Chamberlain, Doorways of New England.

1880 photograph in Museum files shows houses from the East, and looks as though kitchen ell is only one bay deep, suggesting additions to it after 1880.

Envelope of snapshots in Museum files records the furnishings of the house before renovation.

Prepared by: Martha Kingsbury
HABS Maine III
1965

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: An excellent example of the typical 19th century town house built for successful merchants of Portland, well preserved and documented. Contains excellent details, especially the stairway, interior trim and frontispiece.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent with minor modification.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. This structure consists of a large three storied rectangle and two storied ell (Not included in this Survey is the 1911 Gallery addition designed by John Calvin Stevens, Architect). Exterior walls are painted brick set in a Flemish bond. The roof is a flat hip with a balustrade at the eaves. Overall dimensions are 62'5" x 59'3".
2. Foundation: The foundation walls were built on grade with a berm formed to accomodate the sloping site. They are faced with granite ashlar. Interior supports are brick bearing walls, brick piers and wood columns. First floor framing hewn and/or milled wood beams. Round arch under wall between main house and ell.
3. Wall construction: Bearing wall, clay brick in Flemish bond, painted light brown.
4. Porches and stoops: SE entrance porch of wood is half circular, composite columns, red sandstone steps, wood balustrade with urns at newel posts and terminals, turned wood balusters. Full classic entablature, soffit decoration in a plexiform pattern.

5. Openings: Doorways and doors: The front (Spring Street) doorway is side-lighted, flanking windows with decorative wood muntins. Elliptical fanlight, spiderweb pattern. Eight panel wood door. Doorway in ell has half-round fanlight, wood muntins.
6. Openings: Double hung windows: First floor, 9/9 extend to floor level Spring street elevation. 6/6 elsewhere. Second floor 6/6. Third floor 6/3. All windows double hung, all have wood louvered shutters, dark green; iron shutter keepers Spring Street windows. Basement windows, 6 lights, barred opening. Palladian window at second floor over front door and at opposite end of central stair hall at the landing. First and second floor windows have heavy surrounds with dentil cornice. All windows have interior shutters which fold into the jamb reveal. Several 12/12 windows in ell.
7. Chimneys: Four brick chimneys; three with brick caps.
8. Roof: Hip roof, standing seam metal. Metal gutters and downspouts, modified bracketed-pendant cornice decoration. A Greek meander forms the architrave. Wood balustrade, panelled corner posts have urn-shaped wood finials, secondary posts have small finials. Rectangular wood balusters, elliptical segments at diagonal in each panel of the balustrade. Roof hatch; metal vent; and skylight into attic with glass painted over.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:
 - a. Basement: Access from exterior and from ell. Large spaces defined by rows of posts and brick bearing walls.
 - b. First floor: Central stair hall, flanked by one large and one small room each side, extends through house to Gallery foyer; access to ell through small room right rear. Secondary stairs to second and third floor from Gallery foyer. The ell consists of kitchen, dining room for caretaker, back entry, stairs to second floor ell.
 - c. Second floor: Central stair hall flanked by large and small rooms each side. Stairhall off central hall with toilets, closet and access to second floor ell is divided into three spaces.
 - d. Third floor: Two large rooms, and variety of small rooms. Fireplaces are in three rooms.

2. Stairways:

- a. Main stair: Flying stair, turned wood balusters, molded rail in volute at newel of nine balusters. Paneled string and soffit; corbelled boxed string and soffit; exceptionally fine detail and well proportioned.
- b. Stair from Gallery Foyer to second floor: Modern, of no importance.
- c. Stair from second to third floor: Of no importance; fragments may be original.

3. Flooring: Wood boards of varying widths painted brown and grey, modern plastic tile.

4. Walls and ceiling: Painted plaster; paneled wainscot, wood and/or plaster cornices in a variety of classic patterns, some similar to the main extension cornice. The parlor ceiling has a large plaster medallion decoration. Some interior partitions are 2" vertical plank construction.

5. Doorways and doors:

- a. Doorway between stair hall and Gallery foyer was originally garden entrance. Round fan, side lights in half-circular patterns similar to front doorway.
- b. Doors are six paneled mortise and tenon, peg fasteners; all doorways have elaborate surrounds and cornices.

6. Trim: All trim exceptionally fine and well preserved.

- a. All major rooms and hallways have paneled wainscot and elaborate chair rails with encised and/or raised decoration in classic patterns. Fireplace mantels are wood with festoons, swags and raised figures, or have marble mantels and surrounds.
- b. Room cornices are wood and putty, in complicated patterns of brackets, pendants, classical moldings and rosettes.
- c. All windows have inside shutters, usually four per opening, folding into the window reveal.

7. Hardware:

- a. Iron eagle knocker on front door.

- b. Door hardware, majority appears to be original, silver plate knobs and escutcheons.
 - c. Spring - thumb latch on windows (brass).
 - d. Door closer for doorway at stair landing set into reveal.
8. Lighting: Electric, flexible exhibition lighting.
9. Heating:
- a. All major rooms have fireplaces. Two have Franklin-type iron fronts.
 - b. Tubular and/or column radiator "A.A. Griffing Iron Co. Port. Sept. 22, 1874."
 - c. Modern oil-fired hot water system.

D. Site:

- 1. House situated on urban site sloping front to back, several trees. Wood picket fence, posts topped with wood urns similar to those on balustrade at roof.
- 2. An Art Gallery abuts south end of the main house.
- 3. The Charles Clapp House is to the east on Spring Street.

Prepared by: F. Blair Reeves
HABS Maine III
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